



# Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts

A Toolkit for Faith Formation



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Discerning our gifts allows us to recognize how God created each one of us and calls us to serve. When we recognize this call to holiness, we are empowered to embrace God's will for our lives. The Saints are an important aid to discernment. We examine their lives to see the myriad ways they shared their gifts in response to the world's needs, and we ask the Saints to intercede as we prayerfully discern how to serve others and offer our lives to God.

As we discern our gifts, we recall the words of St. Paul:

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)*

# The Toolkit

This Gift Discernment Toolkit can be used by youth ministers, teachers, religious educators and catechists to help middle and high school students discern their gifts, learn about the lives of the Saints, and commit to sharing their gifts with the world.

- A questionnaire to guide students' reflection on their gifts*
- A worksheet for learning about Saints who shared these gifts*
- Twelve biographies of Saints for students to read*
- An activity creating a keychain to remind the students of their gifts*
- Instructions and supply list for youth minister or leader*



# Supply List

## Keychain Activity

- ✓ Cord (suggested: black 2mm x 100 yards Rattail Satin Nylon Trim Cord)
- ✓ Key rings (suggested: 25mm split key rings)
- ✓ 12 different color pony beads; one color per gift
- ✓ Cross-shaped beads
- ✓ 12 small containers; one for each color bead
- ✓ 12 labels; one for each container to identify the gift

- Craftsmanship - Grey
- Discernment - Red
- Evangelization - Silver
- Encouragement - Orange
- Faith - Gold
- Generosity - Pink
- Ministry - White
- Mercy - Green
- Musicianship - Tan
- Pastoral Leadership - Purple
- Service - Blue
- Teaching - Yellow

## Gift Discernment Reflection

- ✓ Gift Discernment Questionnaire (included in this toolkit)
- ✓ Gift Discernment Worksheet and Key (included in this toolkit)
- ✓ Saint biographies (included in this toolkit)
- ✓ Optional reflection station supplies such as candles, rugs or pillows to sit on, display boards for Saint biographies, etc.

# Instructions

The Gift Discernment Reflection and Activity can be done in a variety of pastoral settings including a classroom, meeting space for youth ministry nights, or a retreat center. Two options for leading the activity are outlined below. Youth ministers or leaders may choose to adapt the activity to best suit the students' needs.



## Setup

1. Make copies of the Gift Discernment Worksheet. You will need one per student.
2. Prepare the Saint biographies

*Option A: Make copies to distribute for students to read individually.*

*Option B: Create a Saint Reflection Station by posting the biographies around the room. Students can walk around to read, reflect and pray.*
3. Label each container with a label identifying one of the 12 gifts. Place beads in each of the 12 containers.

*Option A: Set up a table with all 12 containers.*

*Option B: Place each container of beads next to the corresponding Saint biography in the Saint Reflection Station.*
4. Distribute key rings, cord, and cross-shaped beads to students.
5. Distribute the Gift Discernment Worksheet and a pen/pencil to each student.



## Directions for Gift Discernment Reflection

1. Begin by reading aloud the Gift Discernment Questionnaire to the students. Read at a moderate pace, giving students enough time to write down their responses without overthinking. You may use these instructions:

*Listen to each question and mark on the worksheet how much the statement sounds like you on a scale of 0 - 3 (0= not at all, never; 1 = some of the time, once in a while; 2 = most of the time, usually true; 3 = all of the time, definitely true). Don't overthink your responses—write down your first impression upon hearing the statement. Mark your answers going down each of the columns following the numbering of the questions.*

2. Once you have completed reading the questions, direct the students how to tally their scores. You may use these instructions:

*When you have completed the questionnaire, add up your scores across each row and write the total in the last column. Mark your three highest scores. Take note of the Saint image for that row.*

3. Direct the students to turn the worksheet over and find the Saint images for their three highest scores. Ask the students to read over the descriptions of the three corresponding spiritual gifts they embody.
4. Encourage students to learn more about the Saints who shared these gifts by distributing a handout of the Saint biographies (Option A) or directing them to visit the Saint Reflection Station (Option B).



## *Directions for Keychain Activity*

1. After giving students adequate time to learn about the Saints, invite them to create a keychain representing their unique set of gifts. You may use these instructions:

*Gather 8-10 beads (from the bead table or Saint Reflection Station) to reflect your top three gifts in proportion to your scores on the worksheet. Each spiritual gift is represented by a different color bead.*

2. Direct students to return to their seats with their selected beads and assemble their key chains. You may provide these instructions:

*Cut a length of cord, fold it in half and place the loop through the center of the ring. Feed the ends of the cord through the loop and pull tight. String the beads onto the cord and complete with a cross-shaped bead to remind yourself of the gifts that have been given to you from God.*



## *Optional Questions for Reflection*

After students have completed the gift discernment reflection and keychain activity, youth ministers or leaders may choose to use the following questions for written reflection or small or large group discussion.

- *How did you feel while answering the questionnaire?*
- *How do your results fit with what you know about yourself? Were you surprised by anything?*
- *How are you currently living out these gifts?*
- *How could you deepen your understanding of these gifts?*
- *What are some new ways you could share your gifts with your family, friends, school, church, or other community?*
- *What might God be calling you to do through this activity?*



# Gift Discernment Questionnaire

- Respond to each statement according to the scale on the right.
- Write your answers on the **Gift Discernment Worksheet**.
- Use the Gift Discernment Key to discover your gifts!

## Answer Scale

- 0 = *Not at all, never*
- 1 = *Some of the time; once in awhile*
- 2 = *Most of the time; usually true*
- 3 = *All of the time; definitely true*

1. I find that the repair and maintenance of things in my environment come easily to me.
2. I find it easy to tell the difference between right and wrong, and what is truth and lie.
3. I have a good understanding of the gospel, and can share it with others easily.
4. I tend to see the potential in people, not their weaknesses.
5. I have confidence that God will always provide for me, even in difficult times.
6. I am always ready to give money for an important need.
7. I am a very caring person and tend to sympathize with other people.
8. I like to organize people, tasks, and events.
9. I like to sing hymns and songs either alone or with other people
10. I really want others to learn and grow in their faith.
11. I enjoy working behind the scenes and supporting the work of others.
12. Education and knowledge are very important to me.

0 = *Not at all, never*

1 = *Some of the time; once in awhile*

2 = *Most of the time; usually true*

3 = *All of the time; definitely true*

13. I have enjoyed creating various kinds of arts and/or crafts.
14. I know when preaching, teaching, or communication is not true to the Catholic faith.
15. I always look for opportunities to build relationships with people and talk about faith
16. I am able to help others when they are upset about something.
17. I trust God even when my success seems impossible.
18. When I earn money, I always give some back to God.
19. I enjoy helping people and I respond quickly to help those in need.
20. When I am given a job, I can recruit people to help out and explain what needs to be done so they understand what to do.
21. God has given me the ability to play a musical instrument, and I enjoy it.
22. I pray a lot for other people.
23. I enjoy doing routine tasks that support my family, school and church.
24. I enjoy explaining things to people so that they can grow spiritually and personally.
25. I find pleasure in designing, creating or building things.
26. I can see through phoniness or deceit before other people can.
27. I feel that I have to tell my friends about Jesus, especially those who don't go to church.
28. I strengthen those who are down in their faith.
29. I live with confidence because I know that God is always at work in my life.
30. I like knowing that the money I give makes a real difference in the lives and ministries of God's people.

*0 = Not at all, never*

*1 = Some of the time; once in awhile*

*2 = Most of the time; usually true*

*3 = All of the time; definitely true*

31. It is important to me to comfort others when they are hurt.
32. I am a leader at school and church. I can effectively share goals in such a way that others want to carry them out.
33. I have enjoyed being involved with Church, school and/or local musical productions.
34. Relationships are more important to me than other tasks related to a job. I am a "people person."
35. I readily and happily use any of my skills to help wherever needed.
36. When I talk about the Catholic faith, others are interested and want to learn more.
37. I like to spend time and money improving and beautifying things in God's creation.
38. People usually tell me that I am a good judge of character.
39. Most of my conversations with others ends up being about faith.
40. I like motivating others to take steps for spiritual growth.
41. I am regularly encouraging my friends to trust God.
42. It is important for me to support missions with my money and time.
43. Other people know that I care about them. I always try to have a loving attitude.
44. I work best under pressure.
45. I feel my musical ability will be of benefit to the people with whom I come in contact.
46. I would enjoy the responsibility for the spiritual growth of a group of other teens through peer ministry or teaching younger kids in religious education.
47. I like to find small things that need to be done and often do them without being asked.
48. I love to learn new things so I can teach them to others.

# Gift Discernment Worksheet

Use this worksheet to track and tally your responses from the Gift Discernment Questionnaire.  
Once you have your totals, use the **Gift Discernment Key** to see your gifts!

	1-12	13-24	25-36	37-48	Total
1		13	25	37	
2		14	26	38	
3		15	27	39	
4		16	28	40	
5		17	29	41	
6		18	30	42	
7		19	31	43	
8		20	32	44	
9		21	33	45	
10		22	34	46	
11		23	35	47	
12		24	36	48	

0 = Not at all, never  
1 = Some of the time; once in awhile  
2 = Most of the time; usually true  
3 = All of the time; definitely true



# Gift Discernment Key

Tally your responses from the Gift Discernment Questionnaire and use this key to see your gifts.



## **Craftsmanship** - *Joseph*

The gift of sharing a skill in art or building: from painting to pottery, to woodwork or weaving, computer skills or photography that can be used to the glory of God



## **Mercy** - *Teresa of Calcutta*

The gift of empathy and compassion for those who are weak or suffering; readiness to comfort the bereaved, minister to the sick, make peace or offer assistance to those in need



## **Discernment** - *Ignatius*

The gift of distinguishing the will of God, recognizing the difference between truth and error with wisdom and prayerfulness



## **Ministry** - *Peter and Paul*

The gift to motivate, direct and inspire God's people to work together effectively. This gift involves organizing, attention to detail and setting a pattern for others to follow



## **Evangelization** - *John the Baptist*

The gift of sharing one's faith within the Church and beyond to help others learn about the richness and beauty of the Catholic faith



## **Musicianship** - *Cecilia*

The gift to praise God through music and enhance the worship experience of others through singing, playing an instrument, or organizing music for prayer and liturgy



## **Encouragement** - *Monica*

The gift of being able to stand beside other people who are in need and bring comfort, counsel and encouragement



## **Pastoral Leadership** - *Pier Giorgio Frassati*

The gift of leading, facilitating, counseling and providing a pastoral presence with authority grounded in humility



## **Faith** - *Therese of Lisieux*

The gift of confidence and trust in God marked by a healthy prayer life and sensitivity to the will of God



## **Service** - *Martin de Porres*

The gift of identifying the needs and problems of others to work with them in whatever way needed, no matter how small or how big the task



## **Generosity** - *Elizabeth of Hungary*

The gift of offering one's energies, abilities and material resources for the work of the church with willingness, cheerfulness and generosity



## **Teaching** - *Thomas Aquinas*

The gift of communicating information especially about the Catholic faith through speaking, visually or by example so that others can learn

## St. Joseph

- ◆ First Century
- ◆ Feast Day: March 19
- ◆ Patron Saint of Fathers, Church Workers, China and Peru



Scripture tells us little about the life and person of Joseph. According to Matthew and Luke, Joseph was a descendant of King David and a carpenter. Although we do not have much biographical information beyond this, we can get a sense of the qualities that made Joseph an appropriate foster father for Jesus and make him worthy of our admiration by considering his relationship with Mary.

Joseph was engaged to Mary when he received some startling news that Mary was pregnant. Joseph could have reacted with great anger and disbelief that his fiancée was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Instead, he attempted to spare Mary a great deal of shame and scorn by divorcing her quietly rather than publicly renouncing their engagement or announcing her infidelity. He wanted to do what was best for her. Before he

followed through with his decision, an angel of the Lord visited him and confirmed the nature of Mary's pregnancy. The angel told Joseph to marry her and announced the name of the child, Jesus.

Joseph believed what the angel had told him and obeyed the command to take Mary into his home. He later took Mary to Bethlehem, where she delivered the baby Jesus. He was visited by the angel again after Jesus' birth and was told to take Mary and the child to Egypt in order to avoid Herod's attempts to kill Jesus. Again, Joseph obeyed and showed great faith in God.

After the story of the family's return to Nazareth and Jesus' experience in the Temple, Scripture does not tell us anything more about Joseph. This could mean that he died before Jesus began his ministry. In any case, we remember and admire Joseph's faith and goodness as he faced a difficult decision.

*When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. —Matthew 1:24*

# St. Ignatius of Loyola

- ◆ 1491-1556
- ◆ Feast Day: July 31
- ◆ Patron Saint of Jesuits and Retreats



St. Ignatius of Loyola is best known as the founder of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. Born in Spain in 1491, Ignatius became a soldier. At age 30, a cannon ball shattered his leg while leading a battle against the French. The French soldiers carried him through the mountains to his family home in Loyola where he spent several months confined to bed

As he healed, Ignatius read a book on the life of Christ and another on the lives of the saints. He became inflamed with God's love, often imagining himself in the midst of Christ's life and ministry. Before making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Ignatius spent several months outside the town of Manresa. This period was marked by both experiences of desolation, or feeling nothing in prayer, and the consolation of God's grace.

Ignatius' recordings of the reflections and practices that allowed him to grow in relationship with God became the heart of the Spiritual Exercises. In the first week, one contemplates the mystery of salvation offered through Christ. The second week is an imagination of the life of Christ's ministry. The third week is devoted to placing oneself into the scenes of Christ's passion and death. Finally, the fourth week is a focus on the wonders of the resurrection.

The Spiritual Exercises became essential to the spirituality of the Society of Jesus. The religious order was devoted to the service of the Pope, including missionary work in India and China and the opening of schools. Today, Jesuits operate universities and high schools throughout the world. In addition, they continue to serve the poor. Ignatius encouraged daily reflection through the Examen Prayer, paying attention to times one felt close to God and times when they struggled to see God.

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only love of you and your grace. That is enough for me. —Suscipe Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola*

# St. John the Baptist

- ◆ First Century
- ◆ Feast Day: June 24
- ◆ Patron Saint of Jordan, Monks, and Highways



Elizabeth and Zechariah had thought that they would never have children when the angel Gabriel announced that Elizabeth would bear a son, and his name would be John. In his disbelief, Zechariah was struck mute and could not say a word until eight days after his son's birth when it was time to name him. Zechariah announced that his son would be named John and prophesied the importance John's life would have. He said:

"And you, my child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins..." (Lk 1:76-77).

John lived an ascetic lifestyle in the desert until his thirtieth year when he actively began his ministry. John preached repentance and prepared the way for Jesus. John could have gained great

popularity and fame on his own, but he always preached that someone greater was coming. When Jesus asked John to baptize him, John did not feel worthy of this honor; Jesus convinced him otherwise.

As Jesus began his own ministry, John found himself in trouble with King Herod. John had not supported Herod's decision to marry Herodias, Herod's half-brother's wife. Out of fear that John could spread discontent and rebellious behavior among the people, Herod had John imprisoned.

At one of Herod's parties, Herodias' daughter danced for him with such skill that Herod promised her anything she wanted. At her mother's request, her daughter asked for the head of John the Baptist. Bound by his promise, Herod ordered that John be beheaded in prison.

Jesus had praised the work and ministry of John. He told crowds that among those born of women, there was no one greater. Upon hearing the news of John's death, Jesus was deeply saddened. The one who had prepared the way for him had died. The world had lost a great prophet and preacher.

*I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. —St. John the Baptist, Matthew 3:11*



## St. Monica

- ◆ 332-387; North Africa
- ◆ Feast Day: August 27
- ◆ Patron Saint of Mothers and Alcoholics



Monica, who is best known as the mother of St. Augustine, was a woman of great faith and persistence. She endured a very difficult marriage. Her husband, Patricius, was a short-tempered man who drank too much and cheated on Monica. To make matters worse, her mother-in-law lived in their house and was a very difficult woman with whom to get along.

Despite her unpleasant living situation, Monica exercised great patience and prayed for the conversion of her husband and mother-in-law, who were both pagans. Eventually, she won them over, and they saw Monica for the good and faithful person she was. A year before his death, Patricius was baptized.

Monica and Patricius had three sons whom Monica loved very much. She wished to see them live morally good lives in the Church. She was especially concerned for Augustine, who was living a wild and dissolute lifestyle. Again, she was extremely patient and prayed that he might soon see the error of his ways.

In 383, Augustine left for Milan with his female companion and their son without telling his mother. Monica found out where they were going and followed them. Here, she became friends with Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Ambrose was later responsible for mentoring Augustine and helping him in his conversion process. In 387, Monica witnessed the baptism of Augustine by Ambrose. Her work was complete.

On their way back to Africa, Monica died at the age of fifty-five. She died peacefully in the knowledge that her son had found his way to God. In his spiritual autobiography, *Confessions*, Augustine wrote extensively about his mother and what a profound influence she had on his life.

*God of mercy, comfort those in sorrow. The tears of St. Monica moved you to convert her son St. Augustine to the faith of Christ. By their prayers, help us to turn from our sins and to find your loving forgiveness.*

*—Opening Prayer of the Feast of St. Monica*

## St. Thérèse of Lisieux

- ◆ 1873-1897; France
- ◆ Feast Day: October 1
- ◆ Patron Saint of Foreign Missions and France



Thérèse, also known as the “Little Flower,” grew up as the youngest child in a family of five daughters. Sadly, Thérèse’s mother died when she was only four years old. Her father moved the family from Alençon to Lisieux, France. Here, Thérèse’s aunt looked after her and her sisters. Thérèse’s religious development was entrusted to her older sisters.

When Thérèse was nine years old, her oldest sister entered the Carmelite convent at Lisieux and set Thérèse to wondering if she would like to do the same thing someday. After a second sister joined the convent, she began to think seriously about her calling to religious life.

At the age of fourteen, Thérèse had a conversion experience on Christmas Eve. The sadness that she had carried with her since her mother’s death left her heart. She later wrote in her

autobiography, “Love filled my heart, I forgot myself, and henceforth I was happy.” Her desire to enter the convent was now stronger than ever, but she was told that she was too young.

When Thérèse refused to give up on her vocation and persisted in her efforts to join the Carmelites, the bishop finally gave her special permission to enter the convent at the age of fifteen. Happily, she joined her sisters and took up life with the Carmelites. Thérèse always wanted to become a missionary, and in 1897, she was invited to join the Carmelites at Hanoi, which is now in Vietnam. She realized she would be unable to attain her dream, however, when she began to hemorrhage from the mouth on Good Friday. She had contracted tuberculosis and died on September 20 of that year.

Thérèse is remembered for the simplicity of her faith and her belief that anyone can praise God through small deeds and quiet prayers. She truly believed that the perfect Christian life is attainable by all people. Her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, and other spiritual writings still hold wide appeal. She was named a Doctor of the Church in 1997.

*Love proves itself by deeds. I will scatter flowers, perfuming the Divine Throne, and I’ll sweetly sing my hymn of love. These flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least of actions for love. —St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

# St. Elizabeth of Hungary

- ◆ 1207-1231
- ◆ Feast Day: November 17
- ◆ Patron Saint of Bakers and Nursing Homes



Elizabeth was the daughter of the king of Hungary. Given her royal status, her marriage to Louis of Thuringia was arranged when she was four years old and Louis was eleven. She moved to the court of Thuringia where she grew up with Louis and became his best friend. In 1221, Elizabeth married the man she had come to love very much.

Although she lived in the royal court, Elizabeth chose a life of simplicity, prayerful devotion, and service to the poor and sick. Louis supported her lifestyle even when, as one story tells us, he

found a leper lying in their bed whom Elizabeth was nursing to health. She even used the basement of their castle as a hospital. Louis was patient with Elizabeth and loved her all the more for the life she led.

In 1227, tragedy struck when Louis died of the plague. Elizabeth had just given birth to her third child and was devastated by her loss. Elizabeth refused to remarry. She and Louis had promised not to marry another person if one of them should die. Instead, she joined the Franciscans as a tertiary, or secular, member of the order. She lived the rest of her life caring for the sick, the dying, and the poor at a hospice she established. She died at the young age of twenty-four on November 17, 1231.

*Father, you helped Elizabeth of Hungary to recognize and honor Christ in the poor of this world. Let her prayers help us to serve our brothers and sisters in time of trouble and need. —Opening Prayer of the Feast of St. Elizabeth*

# St. Teresa of Calcutta

- ◆ 1910-1997
- ◆ Feast Day: September 5
- ◆ Founder of Missionaries of Charity



Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, better known as Mother Teresa, was born to an Albanian family in Yugoslavia. Her father, a wealthy businessman, died when she was a child and left her family in a difficult financial situation. By age 18, Teresa answered the first of two major callings in her life—the call to religious life. She moved to Dublin with the hope of doing missionary work and entered the community of The Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto.

After some training in Ireland, Teresa moved to Calcutta, India to work as a geography teacher. She took her final vows in 1937. While teaching, she could not ignore the great poverty in Calcutta. She received the second of her callings on September 10, 1946. She was riding on a train to Darjeeling for a retreat when she heard God calling her to live among the poor. Teresa received permission from the pope to leave her convent and begin her new ministry.

Mother Teresa formed the Missionaries of Charity, who lived among the poorest of Calcutta. In addition to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, members of her community took a fourth vow to serve the poor freely. In 1952, Mother Teresa opened a home where people could die in comfort and with dignity. She could not bear the thought of people dying alone in the street without knowing they were loved. The Missionaries of Charity opened more places for the dying and established orphanages, schools and food pantries.

In 1979, Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize for her amazing work. The Missionaries of Charity are present and serving the poor in nearly eighty countries. This is an incredible example of the effect that one single person can have on the world.

Mother Teresa died in 1997 and was mourned throughout the world. In a memorial homily delivered by Cardinal Basil Hume in London, he noted that Mother Teresa “loved and served humanity because she had given herself without reserve to the love and service of God.” Her faith in God led her to treat her fellow humans with the utmost respect, love, and dignity.

*The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace. —St. Teresa of Calcutta*

# St. Peter and St. Paul

- ◆ First Century
- ◆ Feast Day: June 29



Peter was the first disciple called by Jesus and acted as the leader of the 12 apostles. Before being called to discipleship, Peter was a fisherman named Simon. When Jesus met Peter, he gave him his new name, which means “rock” and told him that he would now be a “fisher of men.” Throughout Jesus’ ministry, Peter was one of the three disciples who were closest to Jesus (with James and John).

Peter was far from perfect. When he was called by Jesus to walk out onto the water, Peter was overwhelmed with doubt and could not do it. After Jesus’ arrest, Peter denied knowing him three times. Peter wept after his act of betrayal.

After Jesus’ death, Peter became a strong defender of the gospel and worked to grow the Christian community. He also welcomed Gentiles into the community, an important decision in the development of Christianity. Evidence suggests

that Peter eventually traveled to Rome where he was crucified upside down since he was unwilling to die in the same way that Christ had died. St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican is believed to have been built upon Peter’s grave. Catholics trace the papal office to Peter and recognize him as the first Bishop of Rome.

Paul was equally instrumental in the development and spread of Christianity, but he began his ministry in a very different way. Paul, originally named Saul, persecuted Christians. One day while on the road to Damascus, Paul had a conversion experience and was called by the Risen Christ to spread the gospel. He paid special attention to the Gentiles and worked with Peter to bring them into the church. Paul went on at least three major missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world, and the letters he wrote during this time make up a major portion of the Christian Scriptures.

Like Peter, Paul died in Rome as a martyr. He was probably beheaded around the year 65 during the persecution by Nero. Christians today owe a great deal to the courage and perseverance of Peter and Paul.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. —Corinthians 13: 4-7*

## St. Cecilia

- ◆ Third Century
- ◆ Feast Day: November 22
- ◆ Patron Saint of Poets, Singers and Musicians



Cecilia, whose name means “lily of heaven,” is known for her ardent devotion to God. According to a fifth-century legend, Cecilia vowed to Christ that she would remain a virgin and devote her life to praising and following him.

However, her father refused to accept her vow and forced her to marry a pagan named Valerian. Cecilia married Valerian, but she was determined to remain faithful to her promise of virginity. On her wedding day, she wore clothing made of hair beneath her gown in an attempt to protect her body.

That night, she told Valerian that an angel was protecting her body and that he, too, could experience God’s love if he allowed Cecilia to keep her vow. Valerian promised to believe Cecilia and to respect her wishes if he could see

the angel for himself. This, Cecilia explained, could only happen if he first became baptized. Valerian received the sacrament of baptism from Pope Urban I and was granted a vision of the angel next to Cecilia.

Valerian converted to Christianity, but he soon died as a martyr for his faith at the hands of the Romans. Shortly after, Cecilia was also condemned after refusing to worship the pagan gods. After the Romans failed in an attempt to suffocate her, a soldier tried to behead her. He did a poor job, however, and she lived for three days before finally dying.

Cecilia has become an extremely popular saint and is best known as the patron saint of music. This role comes from the story that, on her wedding day, she heard heavenly music within her heart and was inspired to remain faithful to God and to her promise. When portrayed by artists, Cecilia is often shown with organ pipes in her hand.

*Lord of Mercy, be close to those who call upon you. With St. Cecilia to help us, hear and answer our prayers. –Opening Prayer of the Feast of Cecilia*



## Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

- ◆ 1901-1925
- ◆ Feast Day: July 4

Blessed Pier was born in Turin, Italy in 1901 into an influential, rich family. His father was a political journalist and activist, who eventually served as ambassador to Germany during World War I. His mother was a popular Italian painter. The earliest portion of his education took place at home with his sister, Luciana. Pier was also interested in athletics, mountain climbing and skiing; he also had a deep love for music. Most importantly, Pier loved his faith.

From his father, Pier inherited a passion for justice. Unlike his father, who was an agnostic, Pier grounded his works of justice in the Beatitudes of the Gospel. In college, he studied engineering and mineralogy so that he could serve the needs of the miners, who were treated quite poorly. He would give away his money to the poor, and walk home instead of taking the train. He participated in demonstrations in Italy against fascism, a form of government that valued the

state over the needs of individuals and society. Pier believed this disrespect for the human person was at the root of World War I. In caring for the poor and his activism, he found nourishment in the contemplation of the Blessed Sacrament and prayer, becoming a tertiary of the Dominicans.

In June 1925, Pier was diagnosed with polio. He contracted the disease through his frequent visits with the poor, something that he had never mentioned to his family. He died a month later at age 24. Thousands gathered at his funeral. While his father expected a large number of people at the funeral, he was surprised to see the many poor and needy present. The poor were surprised to learn that this gentle, humble, and loving man was such a well-known member of society.

Blessed Pier is an important model of faith for all of us as we continue to discern our vocations. As a layman in the Church, he lived out the radical call of his baptism through the deep love that he held for each human being he met. Nonetheless, he was not a glum person, saddened by the demands of the Christian life. Pier approached his entire life, whether playing sports, attending the opera, or caring for the poor, as a gift from God.

*Every one of you knows that the foundation of our religion is charity. Without it all our religion would crumble, because we would not really be Catholic as long as we did not carry out or rather shape our whole lives by the two commandments in which the essence of the Catholic faith lies: to love God with all our strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. —Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati*

## St. Martin de Porres

- ◆ 1579-1639; Peru
- ◆ Feast Day: November 3
- ◆ Patron Saint of Social Justice and Race Relations

Martin learned the occupation of physician, but his gifts went beyond medicine—he is believed to have had great powers of healing. Although he tried to hide his gift by pretending to heal the sick with medicinal treatments, people found out about his abilities.

Martin also had a deep spiritual wisdom and was able to give excellent advice that helped his order solve theological problems. Despite all of his talents and gifts, Martin lived a very humble life and never forgot to devote a large amount of time to prayer. He developed a very close friendship with St. Rose of Lima, who also ministered to the poor of Lima.

Martin died of a fever on November 3, 1639. We remember Martin for his unselfish charity, his love for all people and creatures, and his humble efforts to make a difference in his community.



Martin de Porres was born in Lima to a Spanish knight and a freed slave woman from Panama, whose darker complexion he inherited. He was born outside of marriage and was considered an “illegitimate” child when he was baptized. With this label of illegitimacy and the color of his skin, Martin could not expect a life of great social status or wealth.

Determined to live his life in the way he wished, Martin joined a Dominican monastery when he was fifteen years old. In 1603, he became a lay brother and spent the rest of his life at the monastery. Martin did important work for the monastery and for the people of Lima. He ministered faithfully to the sick, the poor, and the orphans. He helped people of all races. He also had a special place in his heart for animals. He truly loved all of God’s creatures.

*Lord, you led Martin de Porres by a life of humility to eternal glory. May we follow his example and be exalted with him in the kingdom of heaven.*

*—Opening Prayer of the Feast of Martin de Porres*



# St. Thomas Aquinas

- ◆ ca. 1225-1275; Italy
- ◆ Feast Day: January 28
- ◆ Patron Saint of Students and Catholic Universities



Thomas Aquinas was educated at a Benedictine monastery where he encountered the writings of Aristotle, who would come to have great influence on his thought and writings. Despite his time with the Benedictines, Thomas decided that he wanted to join the Dominicans.

His family, who really did not want him to join any religious order, was especially opposed to his interest in the Dominicans. They viewed the order as a group of beggars who were not worthy of Thomas' association. His parents went so far as to send his brothers after him, who locked Thomas in a castle for a year. They even sent a woman to seduce him and try to change his mind. Thomas held firm to his vocation, though. He managed to escape, join the Dominicans and continue his studies.

While in Cologne, Thomas studied under Albert the Great and was ordained a priest. Referring

to Thomas' large size and quiet demeanor, Albert predicted that someday "the lowing of this dumb ox would be heard all over the world." He was right.

While living a life of prayer and service, Thomas wrote extensive works that covered every area of Christian doctrine. He used Aristotle to present Christianity as a philosophically sound system. He is best known for his *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*, two of the most influential works in theology.

Thomas' work was not immediately accepted. After his death, his writing was closely scrutinized and even condemned. It did not take long, however, for people to realize the greatness of Thomas' work. He was canonized in 1323 and named a Doctor of the Church in 1567.

Christianity is forever indebted to Thomas' courage to pursue his vocation and devotion to a life in service to God. In the end, he came to the humble awareness that God ultimately remains beyond our human knowledge and understanding. We stand in awe of the Mystery.

*All I have written seems to me like straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me. —St. Thomas Aquinas, after an experience at Mass in December, 1273*

*The illustrations of Saints used in this workbook were created by Julie Lonneman, who holds exclusive rights to the further distribution and publication of the art.*